

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY MEXICO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9419

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: CASC, MX (AMCITS AT HOTEL PLAZA VISTAHERMOSA)

SUBJ: W/W AMCITS AT HOTEL PLAZA VISTAHERMOSA

REF: TELCON FORT/SARDINAS 8/11/75 AND STATE 190916

1. IT APPEARS THAT THE MAJORITY OF GROUPS BELONGINGS WERE DESTROYED IN THE FIRE INCLUDING THE ENTIRE POSSESSIONS OF FOUR IN THE GROUP. FIRE STARTED IN ROOM OF AMERICANS. INCLUDED IN THE LOSSES ARE A PORFOLIO OF PAINTINGS AND VALUABLE CAMERA EQUIPMENT. LEADER OF GROUP, REV. KEITH ELLIOTT VALUES DAMAGES AT APPROXIMATELY 15,000 US.
2. HOTEL'S INSURANCE, SEGUROS INTERNACIONAL, S.A. ONLY COVERS THE BUILDINGS DAMAGES AND DOES NOT INCLUDE LOSSES OF FURNITURE OR TO THE GUESTS.
3. IT IS TRUE THAT THE ADMINISTRATOR, MR. FERNANDO MARTINEZ HAS TRIED TO PLACE THE BLAME ON THE AMERICANS FOR THE START OF THE FIRE. EVEN THOUGH ALL NEWSPAPERS HAVE UNOFFICIALLY REPORTED THAT THE FIRE BEGAN DUE TO A SHORT CIRCUIT. OFFICIAL POLICE REPORT IS NOT YET AVAILABLE.
4. ONLY INJURY THAT AMERICAN SUFFERED WAS ONE CUT THUMB. NAME, DAVID KENLEY WHO WENT TO DOCTOR FOR STITCHES. SUBJECT HAD JUST GOTTEN A TETANUS SHOT. (EMBASSY PROVIDED LIST OF DOCTORS). SUBJECTS ARE PRESENTLY LOCATED AT THE HOTEL GENEVE. EMBASSY VICE CONSUL HAS OFFERED FOLLOWING ASSISTANCE:

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A) ON DAY OF FIRE, VICE CONSUL VISITED THE HOTEL AND SAW SALVAGE OF DAMAGED LUGGAGE AND CLOTHES THAT WERE MELTED AND BURNT. VICE CONSUL MADE RESERVATIONS AT A NEW HOTEL, HOTEL GENEVE. OFFICER ALSO INSISTED THAT HOTEL MANAGEMENT ALLOW AMERICANS TO PAY THEIR BILL AND LEAVE WHICH HOTEL INITIALLY WAS RELUCTANT TO DO. OFFICER ALSO TRIED TO CONTACT INSURANCE AGENT UNSUCCESSFULLY.

B) SECOND DAY: OFFICER CALLED THE CITY DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE AND GOT NAME OF PEOPLE IN CHARGE OF INVESTIGATION. THE CHIEF OF INVESTIGATION IS DR. RAFAEL MORENO.

5. OFFICER ALSO SPOKE TO THE CHIEF OF ACCIDENTS AT THE HOTEL'S INSURANCE COMPANY AND THE PROFESSIONAL ADJUSTOR WHO GAVE OFFICER FULL INFORMATION ABOUT CASE INCLUDING PREDICTIONS THAT PROBABLY NONE WOULD BE FOUND AT FAULT AND THE FIRE WOULD PROBABLY BE CONSIDERED AN ACCIDENT.

6. ON SECOND DAY OFFICER ACCOMPANIED MR. ELLIOTT TO THE HOTEL TO DETERMINE IF HOTEL WOULD BE WILLING TO REACH A GENTLEMEN'S AGREEMENT ABOUT SETTLEMENT OF THE DAMAGES, WHICH WAS NOT POSSIBLE. MR. ELLIOTT ADVISED MR. MARTINEZ THAT SINCE HOTEL DID NOT INTEND TO PAY ANY DAMAGES HE PLANNED TO FILE A LAW SUIT. MR. MARTINEZ RESPONDED THAT HE MIGHT FILE A COUNTER-SUIT FOR NEGLIGENCE.

7. PRESENT STATUS IS THAT GROUP PLANS TO LEAVE MEXICO CITY MORNING OF AUGUST 14, 1975, FILE FOR PERSONAL INSURANCE IN THE UNITED STATES AND HIRE A MEXICAN LAWYER TO SUE HOTEL FOR DAMAGES.
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